Can't Do It Alone: Housing Collaborations to Improve Foster Youth Outcomes

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Research documents that youth transitioning out of the foster care system experience a variety of negative outcomes, including homelessness. Housing collaborations, which aim to comprehensively address resource and service needs for transitioning youth, including permanent connections, education, and employment, have resulted in innovative programming and forged new relationships among child welfare, social service and housing developers, and providers. This article describes the partners, models, and resources several collaborations used and their progress and outcomes; shares insights gained; and explores productive directions for future work.

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0009-4021/2004/050469-26 $3.00

Foster care alumni clearly need safe, stable, affordable housing. Research supports their assertion and paints a sobering picture of homelessness among young adults who have aged out of foster care and documenting the challenge of earning an income that allows youth to meet basic living needs. Written by practitioners in four housing collaborations, this article is intended to stimulate discussion and research, leading to practice improvements that increase the number and variety of housing options and improve the quality of housing for transitioning youth and foster care alumni.

What Research Tells Us

The Cook (1991) study by Westat was the first major exploration of youth outcomes after leaving foster care. The study followed 810 youth in foster care in eight states and found that 25% of the youth had been homeless for at least one night 2.5 to 4 years after leaving care. During that period, less than half were employed, and only 38% held a job for a year or more (Cook, 1991). In another influential research study, Courtney and Piliavin (1998) focused on the Wisconsin child welfare system. Their follow-up of 113 Wisconsin youth found that 12 to 18 months after leaving care, 14% of the young men and 10% of the young women had been homeless for at least one night.

More recently, Mason and associates (2003) studied 222 youth from four foster care agencies six months after they left care. They found that 9% of all the youth and 13% of Agency A's youth, whose average age was 19, had been homeless at least once. Based on 100 youth leaving foster care in Nevada, Reilly (2003) reported that 36% indicated there had been times when they did not have a place to live (19% reported living on the street and 18% in a homeless shelter). Also, 35% reported they had moved five or more times since leaving foster care.

Pecora et al. (2003), using a sample of 1,087 alumni served by 23 Casey Family Programs offices in 13 states between 1966 and 1998, also reported data on homelessness (see Table 1).

These studies indicate that 10% to 36% of the foster care alumni studied were homeless at least briefly after leaving care. Reported rates vary, but the reality does not: Far too many young people leaving care "couch surf" by moving from one friend's place to another, go to homeless shelters, or live on the street for days or weeks at a time.

Underlying the reality of homelessness are three other interconnected factors supporting emotional well-being: relationships, education, and employment. These form a three-legged stool from which youth gain purchase on their future. Without a solid foundation in these three areas, youth are more likely to experience housing problems and have fewer resources to address them. Unfortunately, many youth leave foster care without a strong, positive connection with a caring adult, so they have no one to count on when things get difficult. Research also confirms what youth and practitioners already know: Education and employment pose serious challenges for both youth and providers and, in both of these areas, youth in foster care are generally disadvantaged compared with the general population.

The Casey alumni study offers comparative data, shown in Table 2, on educational achievement and employment.

Goerge and associates (2002) performed a major study on employment outcomes for youth aging out of foster care in California, Illinois, and South Carolina. The study linked foster care databases to wage reporting and Aid to Families with Dependent Children/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families data in these three states, looking at a population of 4,213 youth aging out of foster care. The researchers summarized their findings as follows:

TABLE 1

Percentage of Casey Family Programs Alumni Experiencing Homelessness (*N* = 1,087)

Type of Homelessness	*Percentage*	n
One or more nights homeless ever	42.2	
Homeless for one or more nights within a year of leaving foster care	22.1	1,084
First homeless at age 18 or older	23.6	1,087
Homeless for one week or more	19.4	

Source: Pecora et al., 2003, p. 25.

- Youth aging out of foster care are underemployed. No more than 45% of the aging-out youth had earnings in any of the 13 quarters studied (4 quarters prior to turning 18, the quarter of their birthdays, and 8 quarters following).
- Patterns of unemployment vary by state. About 30% of youth aging out of foster care in Illinois, 23% in California, and 14% in South Carolina had no earnings during the entire 13-quarter period.
- Youth who do work begin to do so early. In all three states, youth were more likely to earn income for the first time during the four quarters prior to and in the quarter of their 18th birthday than in the two years following.
- Youth aging out of foster care have mean earnings below the poverty level. Average quarterly earnings grew by an average of about $500 per quarter in the eight quarters following the 18th birthday. Even so, these youth averaged less than $6,000 per year in wages, which was substantially below the 1997 poverty level of $7,890 for a single individual.
- Youth aging out of foster care progressed more slowly in the labor market than other youth (pp. 2–3).

Table 3 shows the economic picture for youth in the Casey alumni study.

As housing costs increase much faster than wages, foster care alumni face even more formidable challenges in obtaining and

TABLE 2
Educational Achievement (in percentages)

Outcome	*Casey Study*[a]	*General Population*	*Comparison Studies*
High school completion[b] at all ages	86.1	80.4	Courtney et al. (2001): Wisconsin study of high school completion 12 to 18 months after discharge: 63%; Casey Family Services long-term extended foster care with a long--term follow-up: 90%; Casey Family Services nonextended foster care with a long-term follow-up: 44%; Cook (1991): 54% (pp. 3–17); Blome National Study (1997): 77% (p. 46)
High school completion of adults 25 and older	87.8		
Some college or more of adults 25 and older	43.7	51.7	Alexander and Huberty (1993): 27% had some college or vocational training (p. 22); Casey Family Services (1999) long-term extended foster care: 73% had some college or trade school (p. 1); Frost and Jurich (1983): 12.6% had some college (p. 10); Jones and Moses (1984): 7% had some college (p. 62); Zimmerman (1982): 11.5% had some college (p. 65)
Bachelors degree or more of adults 25 and older	10.8	24.4	Festinger (1983): 5.4% graduated (p. 151); Frost and Jurich (1983): 2.1% graduated (p. 10); Jones and Moses (1984): 1% graduated (p. 62); Zimmerman (1982): 1.6% graduated (p. 65)
Currently in school	16.1		

Source: Pecora et al. (2003, p. 28).
[a] $N = 1.087$.
[b] Diploma or general equivalency diploma.

keeping safe housing. In *Out of Reach: 2003,* the National Low Income Housing Coalition (2003) reported that an average hourly housing wage of $15.21 is required to afford a two-bedroom unit at fair-market rent (usually set at the 40th percentile for each area) without having to pay more than 30% of one's income in rent.

TABLE 3
Alumni Employment Rates and Income (*N* = 1,087)

Outcome	*Casey National Alumni Study*	*General Population*
Percentage employed for those alumni in the workforce (ages 25 to 34)	88.1 (*n* = 521)	Approximately 96.3; for population 16 and older: 64.5
Median household income	$27,500 (*n* = 1,008)	$42,148[a]
Median individual income	$16,000 (*n* = 1,024)	$22,199[b]
Ages 15–24	$10,500 (*n* = 191)	
Ages 25–34	$17,500 (*n* = 561)	$25,558
Ages 35–44	$22,500 (*n* = 253)	$30,149[a]
Percentage of alumni receiving any kind of public assistance at the time of the interview	12.2	3.4

Source: Pecora et al. (2003, p. 35).
[a] Median in United States for 2000.
[b] Median U.S. per capita income for 2002.

California, which has some of the nation's highest housing costs, requires an average wage of $21.18 per hour, or $44,000 annually, an unimaginable salary for most young foster care alumni. The need for youth leaving foster care to have training and access to jobs that pay a living wage with health care benefits cannot be emphasized enough as a key way to address the housing challenges these young adults face.

The Situation Requires New Approaches and Collaboration

Youth tell us that housing is a critical concern. Experience and research both confirm that housing for young people leaving foster care requires focus, innovation, and effective action. It is clear that child welfare alone cannot produce desired outcomes, so collaborations are required. Housing collaborations in the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego, demonstrating a variety of approaches to housing for foster care alumni, are discussed here.

The Bay Area

The Bay Area is composed of 10 counties, however, this article only examines the counties of Alameda and San Francisco, offering a snapshot of the housing situation in the region. About 10,000 foster youth reside in the two counties; Alameda County, the third largest in California, has 6,500. Housing in this region is very expensive; a median-priced home is more than $400,000. Rents are also very high compared with those in the rest of the country. Emancipated foster youth face multiple challenges in securing housing: housing costs are high, unemployment is high (around 6.2%), salaries are low in relation to the cost of living, and good jobs are scarce.

Alameda County: The Foster Youth Alliance and Forging the Links Project

Each year in Alameda County, approximately 500 youth age out of foster care. In 2002, the Foster Youth Alliance (FYA) conducted a study that compared youth emancipating from foster care with youth not in foster care between the ages of 18 and 21. The study showed:

- Up to 60% of foster care alumni will be homeless within six months of emancipation, and many of the youth report couch surfing many nights.
- Twenty-two percent of youth in foster care are less likely to be employed than their non–foster care counterparts.
- Forty-four percent are less likely to have graduated from high school.
- Foster care alumni are two to three times more likely to have children before the age of 21 than their non–foster care counterparts.
- Foster youth are six times more likely to receive public assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and general assistance.

Community Partners and Collaborations

In 2000, FYA and Casey Family Programs joined together to improve outcomes for youth in foster care, focusing on housing, services, employment, education, and health. In addition to Casey, members of the alliance include First Place Fund for Youth (FPF), Covenant House of California, the Oakland Unified School District, the Alameda County Office of Education, Fred Finch, the Tri-City Homeless Coalition, the Alameda County Social Service Agency Independent Living Skills Program, Laney College Educational Opportunities Program Services, the West Coast Children's Center, California Youth Connection, the Alameda County Foster Parents Association, Pivotal Point, and Project Independence. FYA has continued to grow and attract new partners to the collaboration.

FPF helps emancipated youth obtain rental housing through a master-leasing program. Early in 2001, Casey and FPF developed a scope of work that consisted of four goals for Casey:

- Identify FYA housing needs and resources.
- Work as a liaison between foster youth tenants and landlords.
- Provide outreach services in the community.
- Assemble a resource manual for the existing housing programs in Alameda County.

In conjunction with this work, Casey initiated meetings among nonprofit builders and developers, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), housing authority officials from the city and county, various service providers, and the county's independent-living skills program staff.

Forging the Links

In 2003, Alameda County and Casey joined together to launch the Forging the Links project. This project is composed of interdisciplinary teams from every sector of the community. Building on the work already done in the county during the last three years, the housing team consists of service providers, county and city housing authorities, nonprofit builders and developers, the alli-

ance, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, and county social services. The collaboration efforts are beginning to yield results. A resource map prepared by Deanne Pearn of FPF shows current capacity to serve 195 emancipated foster youth in specialized permanent and transitional housing, with projected capacity for an additional 145 youth by fall 2006.

San Francisco County

San Francisco has more than 1,200 youth in out-of-home care. More than 200 of those youth will emancipate from foster care in the next year. San Francisco is the second-most expensive housing market in the nation—the fair-market rent for a one-bedroom apartment exceeds $1,500 as of 2003.

United Way of the Bay Area started Housing for Emancipated Youth (HEY) in 2001 to bring together a diverse cross-section of public and nonprofit agencies that serve youth currently and formerly in foster care. This collaborative includes representatives from more than 30 public, nonprofit, and private agencies working together to better support youth as they transition into self-sufficient adulthood. Casey has been affiliated with HEY since 2001. During that time, the Casey staff has worked closely with HEY using in-kind services for strategic planning sessions, staff recruitment, and panel discussions. HEY works with its public and nonprofit partners to advocate for local and state policies and programs that increase the supply of affordable housing and other opportunities for youth formerly in foster care.

Regional Collaboration

During the last three years, programs have made great strides to link developers with the service providers in the region. Agencies have a much greater awareness of the needs of youth in foster care for housing and the social and economic challenges they face in obtaining education and skills, jobs, and housing.

The concept of a regional collaboration is gaining momentum, and in October 2003, HUD, HEY/United Way of the Bay

Area, the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, the Child Welfare League of America, and the State of California Children and Family Services Division cohosted a one-day conference. The purpose of this conference was to bring together every group interested in housing for emancipated foster youth: the youth, service providers, builders and developers, county officials, housing authorities, and foundations. More than 200 people attended, and more than 15 counties were represented. As a result of the conference, HUD committed to provide technical assistance and follow-up to the housing projects that will be developed.

Los Angeles County: For Emancipating Foster Youth, the Goal Is Housing First

In Los Angeles County, home to approximately 1,200 foster youth who emancipate annually from the county's care, the challenge to develop greater housing resources for this population was a leading factor in the redesign of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Emancipation Services Division and the development of the "Housing First" philosophy.

Emancipation Redesign

In July of 2001, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors instructed the Chief Administrative Office (CAO) to oversee the improvement of the DCFS Emancipation Services Division. Starting with a report examining the state of transition services for its foster care population, including probation youth in suitable placements, CAO made major recommendations for reform of the division. The action was the culmination of a number of factors, chief among them that emancipation resources and services were unevenly distributed and, with the near-doubling of the independent-living budget produced by the Chafee Act, a surplus of funds had accumulated by fiscal year's end that could not be distributed to transitional youth in need. The report, authored by Dr. Sharon Watson, outlined a preliminary plan to

make service delivery of emancipation resources more equitable and accessible, including the undertaking of a partnering venture among key stakeholders, both public and private, known as the redesign team.

Led by Watson, the redesign team included experts in housing, data and outcomes development, communications, budget and program development, DCFS, probation, the Department of Mental Health, the Community Development Commission (housing), Community and Senior Services (employment development), the Commission for Children and Families, and key community stakeholders, including Casey Family Programs and United Friends of Children. The team spent two years reshaping and implementing an emancipation services delivery system capable of reaching out to and providing services for more youth.

The partnership also produced much needed additional housing resources, not the least of which were 152 additional beds for emancipating foster youth taking part in one of many service-enriched transitional housing programs. Perhaps one of the most important systemic changes was the expansion of Juvenile Probation's emancipation services and its unification with DCFS. The unprecedented collaboration between DCFS and probation expanded both departments' staff base and significantly reduced the stigma associated with delinquency, thereby opening to the eligible probation population housing opportunities previously unavailable.

Housing Stock Expansion and Increased Access to Rental Subsidies

Developing affordable, safe, stable housing and providing access to subsidies offering recently emancipated youth a start in apartments of their own became the redesign team's number-one priority. Prior to the redesign effort, DCFS had decided to take advantage of the opportunity allowed by the Chafee Act to allocate up to 30% toward room-and-board expenditures for youth who had emancipated from the system. It could use funds to help

newly emancipated youth with first and last months' rent, move-in costs, and three to six months of additional rent.

This was the first time that Independent Living Program dollars could be used for such expenditures, and although it had immediate advantages, it was not long before the room-and-board program bred a new set of challenges. For the youth, the challenge was primarily entering into leases they could not sustain. For DCFS, it was, in part, the matter of coordinating time-sensitive payments. The most pressing concern confronting both youth and the department, however, was underspending and the inequitable nature of distribution of the room-and-board assistance.

The redesign team developed a comprehensive plan for meeting the needs of emancipating and emancipated foster youth. Simultaneously, they drafted a request for proposal (RFP) using a portion of the 30% Chafee room-and-board funding to create more service-enriched transitional housing sites capable of responding to a range of needs and special populations. These two efforts—a demonstration of the Housing First philosophy and charge—resulted in approximately 150 new beds, a commitment to develop 900 more, and, for the first time since Chafee was passed, the county fully spending its budgeted housing funds.

It should be noted that successful collaborations to produce housing stock did not start with the efforts of the redesign team. In prior years, the county's Community Development Corporation worked with DCFS to comanage HUD funds and distribute additional dollars, known as City of Industry funds, to produce or enhance transitional housing programs. The RFP's development and management to maximize the Chafee 30% would not have been possible without the history of collaboration between the two county entities and the clarity in roles and responsibilities that relationship produced. The development corporation, not DCFS, had the expertise in housing and could most effectively oversee the RFP through a partnership with another public housing entity, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

Collaborative Information Sharing Forums and Resources

United Friends of Children, Casey, and other housing partners organized and continue to facilitate the Housing Roundtable, a traveling forum that meets in different communities throughout Los Angeles. The roundtable attracts existing and prospective housing providers for emancipated youth and links them to critical resources, funding opportunities, and instructive information to help fledgling programs understand the complexities of housing development. In addition to facilitating the sharing of information, the authors of the transitional housing RFP used the roundtable to learn from community members what they wanted to see in a county-sponsored grant proposal.

Los Angeles County's Independent Living Program website (http://www.ILPonline.org) is another method of disseminating information about housing and other youth resources. In addition to clearly describing all the transition resources the county and its partners offer, the site offers an extensive listing of transitional housing programs, categorized by location and the special-need population served, if any. Although the group has not developed a monitoring method to link visitors to the site with actual services received, it is likely that the site's accessibility and visibility were important factors in the county's ability to spend the entirety of its independent-living finances, including its 30% housing allocation, for the first time since Chafee nearly doubled that budget. This means more youth than ever were able to access emancipation resources.

Leveraging Resources

Casey Family Programs' Los Angeles County field office, although not a transitional housing provider, works closely with local transitional housing and programs to leverage resources. The Sycamores, a local group home and transitional housing provider in Los Angeles's San Gabriel Valley, works with recently emancipated youth, many of whom have mental health challenges, and places them in scattered-site apartments it coleases with the young

person. That way, the youth can begin to establish a credit and rental history. Casey's Pasadena Alumni Support Center, located near many of the Sycamore apartments, offers staff and resources, such as its computer lab, to the Sycamores youth and personnel. Very often, staff at the support center will also work at the Sycamores housing project, creating a more seamless service delivery process. By sharing Casey resources, the Sycamores can direct its own finances to the leasing of more apartments, thereby offering quantitatively greater opportunities for independent living than previously existed.

Collaboration between public and private sector partners to develop housing resources has played an essential part in the substantial growth of independent-living opportunities for transition-age youth in Los Angeles County. Collaboration required the development of new, sophisticated supportive infrastructures to plan for and equitably distribute large sums of money. Other collaborative undertakings focused on strengthening communications and maximizing the ability to leverage existing resources among community-based organizations. To continue to grow both the housing stock and all transition-based services for foster youth in a region as diverse, political, and expansive as Los Angeles requires a rich variety of collaborative approaches.

The Sacramento Emancipation Collaboration

Dismayed by what was happening to transitioning foster youth, in 1999, several public and private agencies formed the Sacramento Emancipation Collaboration to help young people leaving foster care. Goals of the collaboration include:

- increasing the number of safe, stable housing options for foster youth;
- maximizing housing funds and resources;
- ensuring that youth know about housing resources available to them before emancipation;

- ensuring that foster care agencies and programs know about the resources available for foster youth; and
- significantly decreasing the number of youth who become homeless on emancipation.

Sacramento Emancipation Collaboration members share functions and fund services through a blend of public and private money, detailed as follows for the first year of the collaboration: The Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance oversees all of the housing programs and provides $500,000 in HUD home funds for operation, staffing, and administrative services. The Department of Health and Human Services contributes $367,000 in Chafee 30% funds to support independent-living services at housing sites. The Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency funded $500,000 for housing and provided approximately 200 housing choice vouchers in the first two years of programming. Casey Family Programs funds case-management services and community training through a $602,000 contract with the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA) and provides a $50,000 flexible funding grant for services not otherwise funded. In addition to providing services funded through Casey, SETA offers access to other funding streams including Welfare to Work and Cal Works.

Adolfo Housing Services for Former Foster Youth

Adolfo Housing Services for Former Foster Youth provide a continuum of housing options combined with supportive services for foster care alumni younger than 25. Services are individualized and include guidance from Adolfo staff in achieving life goals, employment and educational services, practical living skills, therapeutic services, connections to appropriate community resources, and mentoring. All applicants receive help in selecting the right housing service from the Sacramento Emancipation Collaboration Team. Through several community agencies,

Adolfo offers transitional and permanent housing options and rent subsidies, including Shelter Plus Care Certificates for participants with low incomes and barriers that impede their ability to maintain housing, and housing choice vouchers for foster care alumni able to live successfully on their own. Volunteers of America received the service contract to provide transitional housing, which offers a safe, supportive, nurturing environment including around the clock onsite mentors for up to 24 months. Permanent housing, available from Lutheran Social Services and Transitional Living and Community Support, provides subsidized housing and assistance to former foster youth who have mental health issues and other barriers that significantly impede their ability to live independently. As they develop skills, youth are supported in moving to increasingly more independent living options. The two programs received the service contract together. One serves 13 youth, and the other serves 12.

Accomplishments

To date, the Sacramento Emancipation Collaboration has

- created a single coordinated process for accessing housing services for emancipated foster youth,
- procured 200 housing choice vouchers with a commitment for 25 to 50 additional vouchers,
- developed three sites housing 32 youth,
- added permanent supported housing for 25 youth with mental health disabilities, and
- developed a Welcome Home furniture and household items program into a youth-led and -staffed enterprise and will explore the development of a 501(c)3 thrift shop.

To make these changes possible, community capacity has significantly increased in a variety of dimensions: in relationships and the ability to work together, in knowledge and skills in housing, in understanding foster care issues, and in committing to better outcomes for foster youth. A similar process is happening in employment services, including services for disabled alumni—

planners are creating specialized services that are being piloted in other sites to support youths' ability to earn a living wage.

*San Diego**

According to the San Diego County Apartment Association and the San Diego Housing Commission, the average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in San Diego County is $775. The Apartment Association data show that the least expensive rents for studios and one-bedroom apartments in the city of San Diego are $502 and $512, respectively. If a newly emancipated foster youth locates a job working 40 hours per week at the minimum wage of $6.75 per hour, the youth can only afford rent of $351 per month, based on spending no more than 30% of income on rent. Working full-time leaves little time to pursue educational or vocational training; paying more than 30% of income in rent would be difficult when car insurance alone can run to hundreds of dollars per month, especially for young men. The affordability gap is clear.

The Commission on Children, Youth and Families is the planning, oversight, and implementation body for countywide projects that provide integrated, comprehensive services to low-income, high-risk, multiproblem youth and their families. Its Supportive Housing Ad-hoc Committee serves as an advisory group whose work includes promoting policies and programs that will ensure that each youth emancipating from San Diego County foster care has an affordable, safe place to live and access to supportive services. Committee members include representation from a broad spectrum of county and community providers, including the Commission on Children, Youth and Families; Offices of the Public Defender of San Diego County; the Department of Housing and Community Development; Casey Family Programs; Health and Human Services Children's Services; Homestart; the Corporation for Supportive Housing; Juvenile

* San Diego section and recommendations adapted, with permission, from Dependency Court Policy Group & the Commission on Children, Youth and Families (2003).

Court; Legal Aid Society of San Diego; and several concerned private citizens.

In July 2003, the Commission on Children, Youth and Families, the Human Services Agency, and Juvenile Court sponsored a strategic planning meeting to get community input on the housing needs of emancipating foster youth. Lessons learned and their recommendations for future work are:

- Youths' individual strengths and needs vary greatly, so they require a continuum of housing options, because different types of housing situations require varying levels of independent-living skills. The inventory of existing options in the county, along with current vacancies and waiting lists, indicate some capacity to provide assistance along the spectrum, but it is not enough to meet the demand. The ad hoc committee will explore development of a continuum of housing programs to include intergenerational home sharing, in which youth and seniors can help each other meet their needs, cluster or transitional living programs, scattered-site apartments, and emergency shelters other than existing shelters that accept older adults.
- Case management is critical to ensure that housing is not a temporary extension of pre-emancipation support. Along with other support systems such as transportation, job skill development, and substance abuse treatment, case management is as important as bricks and mortar. In the county's current 24-month supported housing program, in which 52 youth pay 30% of their income toward rent, several partners provide case management, leveraging individual agencies' resources and operational requirements. For example, since the county cannot provide case-management services for youth older than 18, community programs serve those youth; Casey Family Programs case manage alumni not participating in other programs.
- Collection of exit statistics and ongoing data on emancipating foster youth, including information on their hous-

ing arrangements, is critical to understanding and meeting their needs through programs and services. Locating youth after they have left the system is a significant obstacle to meeting this goal.

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned fall into the following categories: specific housing needs, training and support, use of existing resources and involving nontraditional partners, and data and research.

Specific Housing Needs

Expand Current Inventory. We have a shortage of transitional housing, and as a result, youth are falling through the cracks. For foster care alumni, the lack of housing is made worse by the fact that when a vacancy opens up, it may be filled by some other sector of the population, as the beds are not always designated for youth formerly in foster care. In addition, many youth in foster care do not meet the criteria for the existing transitional living programs or other subsidized housing. Agencies need to expand the inventory of specialized transitional housing units specifically for youth formerly in foster care.

Expand Housing Options and Add Intergenerational Home Sharing to the Continuum. A continuum of options from service-enriched to independent housing is needed to meet a range of youth development levels. In addition to expanding current options, agencies should explore intergenerational home sharing. Due to the high cost of rent, home sharing may be more economically realistic than living alone or with roommates. The needs and strengths of both youth and seniors could complement one another with this type of housing option in many ways. Seniors often have extra space, expertise, and support to offer, whereas youth can run errands and help with chores; both can provide social interaction for one another. Some cities with intergenera-

tional home sharing programs have the youth provide labor for the household in exchange for a room.

Options Should Be Geographically Accessible. Options should be located throughout the area where youth are living. A living environment that might make optimal demands on the youth's independent-living skills while providing necessary services will not be helpful if it means that the youth has to move away from an existing support system, a job, or employment training.

Emergency Housing. Although homeless shelters exist, many foster care alumni are vulnerable and not appropriately housed with older adults. Emergency housing, specific for this population, is required.

Long-Range Solutions. Youth need affordable longer range housing solutions; otherwise, those who are not able to grow their incomes at the same rate or at a faster pace than rising rents will face homelessness all over again at the completion of their transitional housing stay.

Special-Needs Youth. Some youth have special issues that are not easily solved by typical transitional housing models. Many youth formerly in foster care are parents and need additional space and support for their children. Other challenges include physical or mental disabilities, long-term medical problems, and chemical dependency. Those who have changed placement several times often need extra support. All of these are risk factors that decrease the viability of what might otherwise be good housing solutions, so individualized approaches must be available to address these needs.

Training and Support

Training to Prevent Homelessness. Foster care alumni have noted that some youth reach age 18 without ever having held a job. Youth also stress the need for earlier training. To prevent homelessness and increase economic success, youth must complete high

school with a diploma, obtain job skills preparation and actual employment experience while in care, and acquire more effective lifeskills training, including financial literacy, provided for longer periods of time. Effective learning is most likely to occur when youth are actively engaged in the planning and development of training, the content is relevant, and learning is supported in the living environment. Developmentally appropriate preparation for adulthood should be incorporated through the child's time in foster care, from intake to aftercare. To incorporate this, foster parents and other care providers also need training and support. An optimum array of services and supports should begin before emancipation and continue during the entire transition period until the youth is in a permanent, stable setting.

Support During Transition. Because each housing environment brings with it varying requirements for independent functioning, it is critical that the support systems be provided so that youth are successful and grow in their capacity to move toward greater independence. Beyond case management, other support systems needed include education, job skills training and employment, transportation, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, medical and dental care, and development and maintenance of social support systems.

Use of Existing Resources and Involving Nontraditional Partners

Resources currently available could be better incorporated into efforts to meet the need for more housing and support services. Young people need to be included in all aspects of managing this area. Earlier involvement helps youth have more realistic expectations, and agencies need to expand continuing communication links so youth know how to obtain resources when they are in trouble. By the same token, collaborations need ongoing feedback about emerging needs and how well current resources are meeting youths' needs.

Former foster parents and group home staff are another source of information and assistance. Extended family members might be able to assist in independent-living skills and information, even if they cannot provide housing support. Recognizing and using already-existing relationships such as these is a logical source of support for youth.

Finally, other housing and funding resources must be tapped through public and private housing agencies and development corporations. In San Diego County, a specific example of an underused resource is that Chula Vista is the only city using HOME dollars to provide housing. Agencies should approach other cities about this option. As highlighted in the collaboration descriptions, child welfare practitioners need to get more proficient at involving nontraditional partners and reaching out to the housing industry. This requires new skill sets to develop an extended set of contacts and craft mutually beneficial approaches.

Data and Research

Efforts to assist emancipating foster youth are limited by the lack of comprehensive management data so that we can understand the full scope of youth needs and be able to quantify them. This is compounded when we lose contact with foster care alumni after they emancipate. One effort that may alleviate the latter problem is to expand the use of drop-in centers and outreach efforts. Any effort to expand outreach, however, should be mindful not to create service expectations that cannot be met, because that increases distrust and makes it harder for youth to avail themselves of existing services.

The research agenda needs to include longitudinal studies that systematically explore the effect of education, employment, and other interventions while in care on homelessness and other indicators of adult economic status. In addition, studies that correlate self-reports of adult success with interventions while in care would also be extremely helpful.

Conclusion

No one solution, no one silver bullet, will address all the housing challenges faced by transition-age youth in foster care, their caregivers, and other stakeholders wrestling with high housing costs, insufficient funding, and the lack of skills and resources required to assure success at first-time independent living. What is apparent, as demonstrated in part by the collaborations discussed here, is that no one program, department, or funding stream can do it alone. Just providing housing for emancipating foster youth without appropriate supportive services that promote employment, education opportunities, and emotional well-being is a recipe for failure, and for many, only puts off the bleak reality of homelessness a little while longer. Throughout a youth's time in care, workers need to make more effective efforts to support permanent connections, education, and employment. Transitional and permanent housing for youth formerly in foster care built and sustained through thoughtful collaboration and supported by sound programming emphasizing educational attainment, employment preparation and work experience, and personal growth and development is the only formula for success.

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